

## DEVELOPING YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK

Social media effectively connects you with the world on issues that you are passionate about, including **National Recovery Month: Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, People Recover (Recovery Month)**, as well as broader treatment and recovery topics. Through your organization's blog and social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, you can reach a larger audience, allowing more rapid communication than through traditional media outlets. If you already have solid background knowledge of social networking, this document will help you expand your knowledge of social media to enhance your promotion of **Recovery Month** or treatment and recovery in general. If you are a social media beginner, it will be helpful for you to also refer to the "[New Media Glossary](#)" document in this toolkit, which clearly defines relevant terms.

**Recovery Month** is sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This year's theme, "**Join the Voices for Recovery: Recovery Benefits Everyone,**" emphasizes that:

- All Americans have the opportunity to access provisions within the Affordable Care Act and Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act (MHPAEA), aimed to improve physical and emotional health while ensuring people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost.
- Public awareness will increase access for those in need of essential substance use and mental health treatment and recovery support services, including behavioral health treatment.
- These legislative changes will improve the overall health and well-being of people in the United States.

The passage of the MHPAEA provides parity, or the recognition by all insurance services—both public and private—that substance use and mental disorders are treated comparably to other physical health and medical conditions.

This document will provide ideas on how to incorporate social media and social networks into your everyday life and spread **Recovery Month's** message and theme in September and throughout the year.

### How Do I Start Incorporating Social Media Into My Everyday Life?

When working with social media, you must establish your goals and objectives, which will also determine how involved you will be within the social media network. For example, your goal may be to have over 500 Twitter followers, to post a new and interesting status every day, or to use a blog to create a forum for people affected by substance use and/or mental disorders. Keep your goals in mind when creating your own profile, account, or page. You will have extensive control over the content and the overall message that you want to include. First, start by searching social networking sites for organizations or social media members that have similar goals and missions, where discussions can be easily started and relationships built. Remember that social media and blogging rely on interacting and networking with others. Below are some tips that foster reciprocated support for your Facebook page, Twitter account, or blog from others.

- Posting positive statements on another user's wall
- "Liking" another page
- Updating your status to promote another page or initiative. By placing an "@" in front of the users name on Facebook, for example @**RecoveryMonth**, your status can link directly to the **Recovery Month** Facebook page
- Recommending that friends visit a Facebook page
- Re-tweeting a positive message concerning treatment or recovery issues
- Promoting another page's event if it relates to your overall message
- Commenting on a blog post you find helpful or useful and reposting it on your blog
- "Sharing" another page's status updates to show support

## How Can I Use Blogs to Reach Out to Others in the Digital Space?

Blogs can be used to create online communities for people with similar interests or who support the same causes. Keep in mind that blogging requires a large time commitment. Coming up with fresh, new content and posting it at regular intervals makes a blog successful. If you don't think you will be able to post a new entry most days, your time might be better spent participating in conversations on other blogs, rather than starting your own.

Before you create your own personal blog, or one for your organization, use the resources below to gauge existing blogs and what topics they discuss.

- **Google Blog Search**, which you can search by date and relevance at <http://blogsearch.google.com>. Use this site to see what bloggers discuss about a specific topic, such as substance use and mental disorders, treatment, or recovery. To develop a relationship with the writer, you should follow the blog regularly, paying particular attention to the owner's latest posts so it shows that you are engaged.
- **Blog Pulse**, where you can search by date and relevance at <http://www.blogpulse.com>. Use this site to create a graph that plots the number of online conversations taking place about a specific topic. This will help you identify ways to positively contribute to the conversation.

If you decide to start your own blog, many websites offer guidance, such as Wordpress, accessible at <http://www.wordpress.com>, or Blogger, accessible at <http://www.blogger.com>. Once you name your blog and start to post, use sites such as Facebook or Twitter to promote it.

Use the following tips to help you connect with others on message boards and blogs:

- **Comment on other people's blog posts** and let them know about the resources available to help them combat a substance use and/or a mental health problem. Also, direct people to <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.
- **Offer resources and support**. Treatment and recovery services are sometimes offered online, and anonymous users may post messages about their own recovery journey. Respond with words of encouragement or helpful information and resources. Tell them about **Recovery Month** activities and ways to get involved to further the campaign's reach.
- **Participate regularly in message boards** about substance use and mental disorders and recovery, and offer resources and tips.

## How Do I Use Facebook to Promote *Recovery Month*?

Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has developed into a worldwide social networking website with more than 500 million active members. The site offers two unique ways to join: either with a personal account or with an official page account.

- A **personal account** is started by signing up with your name and email address. It features personal interests, contact information and other personal information, photos, and videos. You can change the privacy settings on your personal account page to limit or widen the visibility of what you want your friends or other Facebook users to see.
- An **official page** is used if you want your organization to join Facebook. These pages can help promote a company or an initiative and are entirely public, so non-Facebook users can view them as well.

Once you start an account, you can:

- Find other Facebook members by using the search function, and "friend" or "like" any pages that share the same interests as you.
- Share resources or link to sites that are helpful to those visiting your page, such as treatment or recovery services in your area.
- Create an "event page" and send invites to your friends with more information about a certain event in your community to publicize a **Recovery Month** event.

Add the **Recovery Month** Events Widget, accessible at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/Community-Events/EventsWidget.aspx>, to promote your specific event or all **Recovery Month** events on your blog or website.

- The invitation should include the location, time and date, a brief description of the event, and the option of including any interesting or related links.
- Make sure to stress the importance of RSVPing to the event by clicking the yes, maybe, or not attending buttons.
- Since you are working in a digital space, you can create an online event, such as a rally or a forum, and invite your Facebook friends who are interested in **Recovery Month** to join and chat with others who actively promote treatment and recovery.

## How Can I Use Twitter to Promote Recovery Month?

Another popular social networking site is Twitter, a microblogging service that allows “tweets,” or text-based posts up to 140 characters long, to be displayed on your profile page. These tweets are publicly accessible unless you edit your privacy settings. “Following” another Twitter account shows that you have interest in what they tweet, and lays groundwork for a relationship. The site is easy to use and allows you to choose your Twitter name, write a short biography, and to choose an account icon image. Below are some features of Twitter to help promote **Recovery Month**.

- Use the search function to look up keywords relating to **Recovery Month**, substance use and mental disorders, treatment, and recovery, to find conversations on the topic or users who have related interests or messages. When you find Twitter users who have similar interests, be sure to follow them and reply to their tweets. This is a great way to gain followers.
- If you come across an appealing tweet, **retweet** the information to share with others. To do this, add a “RT” in front of the text so other Twitter users realize that it is a re-tweet, and feel free to add commentary if you support the message. For example, “**YourUserName**: Yes! Only one more week! RT **@RecoveryMonth**: One week until **National Recovery Month!**”
- Show support to Twitter users who post on your feed by **replying to their post**. This can be done by using an “@” symbol directly before a Twitter user’s name, and be sure to thank and support their initiative to promote them.
- Create a **hashtag**, or “#” with a key phrase (like your organization’s name), to allow users to easily search for you using this key phrase. Make sure to use **#RecoveryMonth** whenever you want your tweet to link to the **Recovery Month** Twitter account.
- Send **direct messages**, or private tweets, to another Twitter user if you want to communicate privately.

Use Twitter to quickly and succinctly inform your followers or other users on general updates, events, or anything of interest to the treatment and recovery community. By joining members together, you can form an online community that can communicate about common interests or can be used as a support system. Be sure to start following **@RecoveryMonth** for information about upcoming events, personal stories of recovery, and general conversation about the benefits of treatment and recovery. Hopefully, they will follow you back!

### Tips for starting an official Facebook page:

1. After signing up, fill out your profile with either your organization’s or personal information, including contact information.
2. Upload either a personal photo or your organization’s logo.
3. Control what information you make public by editing your privacy settings.
4. Use the search bar to find friends on Facebook, and “friend” them to include them in your network.
5. Update your status to let your network know you are new to Facebook and post any comments that will help support your page.

## What Other Social Media Outlets Can Help Promote **Recovery Month**?

While Facebook and Twitter dominate the social networking space, other social media applications can be used to successfully spread ideas and communicate the **Recovery Month** message through video, photo, and location-based communication.

- Use **YouTube** to upload videos that relate to positive messages surrounding **Recovery Month**, substance use and mental disorders, and the benefits of treatment and recovery. Subscribe to different channels and comment on videos you enjoy, to grow your fan base and find others who share similar interests. When uploading videos, choose the most relevant category and use tags so other users can easily find your content.
- Use **Flickr** to display images and videos of **Recovery Month** events. Tag and title them with specific keywords, such as your organization or event name, so they can be found easily by search engines. Join a Flickr group that has similar interests and comment on their discussion boards or photos. You can also create your own group if you are unable to find one that relates to your organization or interests.
- Use **Foursquare** to “check in” at **Recovery Month** event locations using applications on smartphones (e.g., iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Palm) or mobile Internet. This updates other **Recovery Month** supporters about the specific location of an event or networking opportunities in your community.

Be sure to check out the **Recovery Month** YouTube page, accessible at <http://www.youtube.com/user/RecoveryMonth>, to watch public service announcements and other videos relating to treatment and recovery.

## How Can I Use Social Media Successfully?

There are many different ways to promote **Recovery Month** and your organization through social media. Always remember when working with social media that you are writing in a public forum where nothing is ever deleted. Also, to keep your friends or networks continually interested, be positive and keep your posts or statuses current, optimistic, and thought-provoking. If a friend on Facebook or a follower on Twitter is offensive, simply “defriend,” stop following the person, or even block him or her. If someone’s actions are inappropriate or threatening, contact your social media network’s administrator and file a report. Always remember that your goal is to spread positive messages and promote awareness for substance use and mental disorders, treatment, and recovery. If you are passionate about these topics, there are millions out there who share your interest and are willing to listen and share their stories as well.

Continue to visit the **Recovery Month** website, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, to see what resources are available to help you connect online. Keeping ahead of the social networking trends will help to promote your **Recovery Month** activities and raise awareness about substance use and mental disorders, treatment, and recovery.

**Inclusion of websites and other resources mentioned in this document and on the **Recovery Month** website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.**